

**Legislative Testimony
Appropriations Committee
Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments
HB 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023
February 23, 2022**

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Dr. N. Summer Lerch. I have been practicing dentistry in Connecticut for nearly 40 years. I have a general adult practice in New Haven. I have been a CSDA member for many years and have actively followed the reimbursement rates of our state's Medicaid program.

I am writing in regards to the Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments for the Department of Social Services and the proposed increase to adult dental Medicaid reimbursement rates.

YAY I say! Oral healthcare is essential to overall health and well-being. Untreated dental diseases such as gingivitis, periodontal disease, and other oral infections may lead to complications associated with heart disease and diabetes as you probably know. As importantly, dental disease impacts our emotional and social well-being. It is essential that dental care be made readily available to those who qualify for Medicaid and that adequate funding for those programs continue. When people feel cared for, they are less depressed, mischievous and overall, less disruptive.

When I first opened my dental practice in 1984, I wanted to help everyone. As a solo provider, I soon realized the impact of low reimbursement rates on managing a business. It was not possible to keep my doors open, and hold appointments for people who did not show up and then, for those that did, not get paid what my time, training, care and overhead demanded of me. Today, I have a healthy mix of fee for service and insurance based dental care in my office. Let's give our newer dentists this opportunity to be of service state-wide too.

The adults who rely on Medicaid are the least likely to access dental care (including basic preventive services.). They face the biggest cost barriers to dental care, and are more likely than their higher income counterparts to experience dental pain, report poor mouth health, and find their lives less satisfying due to their poor oral health.

Imagine if you couldn't, or wouldn't, smile because your teeth are brown, or missing or have holes in them. Not a happy thought.

I want all people in CT to have access to good dental treatment to support their physical, emotional and social wellbeing. It is a right of all of ours, and supports our collective interests for all people.

I thank you for your time and considered approach to this important issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

Summer Lerch

N. Summer Lerch, DDS, FAGD, AAACD

2375 Orange Street
New Haven, CT 06511
O. 203-624-5256 C. 203-980-9663